NUTRITION

"Meat-Free" Goes Mainstream

Today, science has a better understanding of why fruits and vegetables should be part of a healthy eating plan. You probably enjoy them for their wonderful flavors and bright colors and because they are good for you too.

Fruits and vegetables provide important nutrients including antioxidants such as vitamins C and E, beta-carotene and lycopene. Antioxidants have disease-fighting properties that protect cells from damage by substances called free radicals. Antioxidants work by neutralizing free radicals. Today, it is easy to order a vegetarian dish at your favorite restaurant or buy meat-free products at the grocery store. Many of these meat-free products are soy-, vegetable-,grain-, or bean-based.
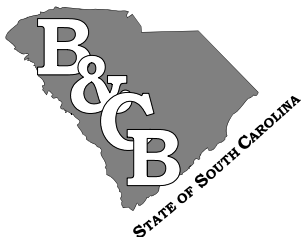
Versatility is the Key

When you think of meatless food products, you may only think of "veggie burgers." However, consumer demand for more variety has expanded the range of vegetarian choices in the supermarket. Planning nutritious family meals with meat-free products is quick, easy and economical. For example, ground meat substitutes are easily incorporated into your favorite family recipes for chili, spaghetti sauces, or casseroles.

Food manufacturers offer familiar, pre-cooked and convenient meat-free products such as burgers, hot dogs, "chicken" nuggets, corn dogs, and prepared breakfast foods that easily fit into American eating patterns.

Getting a Jump Start

♦ Explore new foods at your grocery store. Pick out a different meat-free product from the variety located in the freezer section to try at home each week.

♦ Load up on fresh fruits and vegetables. Reach for a piece of fruit or cut up fresh veggies when the urge to munch calls you.

♦ Be adventurous and try a vegetarian entrée at a restaurant. You may be pleasantly surprised at the number of meat-free dishes there are and how delicious they are too.